



**CSML**  
*Civil Society and Media Leadership Program*



# **Media Component Start-up Assessment**

**Conducted by IREX and the  
Liberia Media Center**

**June 2010**

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## **A WORD FROM THE CHIEF OF PARTY**

Post conflict Liberia is shifting focus from stabilization to development. Strong civil society and media sectors are needed to drive the informed civic participation that leads to good governance, dynamic democracy and economic growth. To this end, the USAID funded Civil Society and Media Leadership Program's five year goal is to sustain peace in Liberia through greater inclusion, giving a voice to, informing, and engaging Liberian Citizens.

Civil society and media organizations struggle with weak capacity, impoverished constituencies, and fractured infrastructure. Their leaders are driven by passion, conviction and long experience in improvising. Liberian media has expanded in the post-war democracy, but professionalism lags, many outlets are not independent or sustainable and vast parts of the country have no reliable news sources. The Civil Society and Media Leadership Program will support its Liberian partners to address these challenges so that civil society and the media together can contribute fully to Liberia's Strategic Objective of "enhancing citizen participation in and ownership of government policy formulation and implementation".

In order to contribute to the Strategic Objective, however, we must better understand and document the current situation of Liberian civil society and media organizations. To this end, both the civil society and media components of the program begin with start-up assessments. The media team spent two weeks traveling across CSML target counties, interviewing managers and editors and inspecting equipment and facilities. The outcome of this assessment will guide the Civil Society and Media Leadership Program over the next five years.

On behalf of our team, we would like to thank all who cooperated in making the assessment possible. Thanks to the various outlets for opening their doors to us, and thanks to those who were kind enough to host the team during those somewhat exhausting but rewarding six days on the road through five counties.

Tilly Reed  
Chief of Party  
IREX  
Civil Society and Media Leadership Program

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Liberia has a vibrant media culture which has been experiencing robust growth since the end of the war with new outlets emerging on a regular basis. According to the Press Union of Liberia's (PUL) count, there are 40 newspapers based in the capital, Monrovia. In a country where growth in the industry was once stifled by political repression and undue restrictions, this is phenomenal and perhaps unparalleled to any other time in Liberia's history.

The radio industry is growing at an even more significant rate. In pre war days, Liberia had four major radio stations – ELBC, ELWA, ELCM and Radio Baha'i. Today the country can boast of about 20 Monrovia based radio stations. In fact, since the beginning of the Civil Society and Media Leadership Program (CSML) in April, 2010, at least one more station has gone on the air. Outside of the capital, there are more than 45 community radio stations, started mostly with U.S. and European funding.

As the media sector grows, there are concerns that the professional development of practitioners is not keeping pace with the growth. In other words, the professional capacity of many of those who work in the sector is still lagging. There has been considerable investment in efforts to “professionalize” the Liberian media, but, like every other aspect of society, the media was severely impacted by the war and recovery is proving to be a long and difficult process.

Part of the mission of the CSML is to help the recovery effort by working to build the professional capacity of the sector. CSML will work with media organizations in seven counties – Montserrado, Grand Bassa, Bong, Lofa, Nimba, Grand Gedeh and River Gee. CSML targets several areas of capacity building – basic journalism, investigative reporting and other specialized training, management, business development and sustainability, among others.

For community radios, while we build the professional capacity of the staff, we will also focus on expanding their reach, equipment upgrades and maintenance. The goal: to turn stations into models for others to emulate and to ensure that potentially viable entities can be sustained beyond the NGO cycle.

To fully inform the process of developing the CSML media component implementation plans, the Start-Up Assessment was conducted. It was a collaborative effort between IREX and its implementing partner, the Liberia Media Center (LMC). The Assessment Team (called the Team) included Bill Burke (IREX Senior Media Specialist), Maureen Taylor, Ph.D. (Social Impact consultant), Lamii Kpargoi (LMC), Patmillia Doe (IREX Program Officer), and Josh Kpelewah (IREX/Social Impact Monitoring and Evaluation Manager). Marcus Shamu (LMC technician) joined the team for the county radio assessment. The Assessment was conducted over a two-week period in June 2010. The Team visited more than 25 media outlets in Monrovia and five of the CSML target counties.

## **2. METHODOLOGY OF ASSESSMENT**

The Assessment aimed to gain a clearer picture of the media sector in Liberia. The findings will inform IREX's approach to designing implementation plans for the various initiatives of the CSML. Additionally, the findings will be used to establish the main criteria to be utilized in selecting CSML partners and target media outlets. To learn more about the opportunities and challenges in the media sector, Team members met with the management of various outlets and media support associations. Interviews ranged from 30 minutes to one and a half hours. The Team followed a moderately scheduled interview guide that was generated by the CSML staff. Questions inquired about management, staffing, programming, newsroom culture, sustainability, training needs, and gender ratios. The interview guide can be found in Appendix A (Start-up Assessment Plan). The interviews also included tours of the facilities and conversations with staff and organizational members.

The Team had two weeks to conduct the assessment and realized the impossibility of reaching every outlet in the seven target counties. Therefore, some interviews were conducted by telephone. Also, the Team decided against assessing all newspapers, radio and television stations. There are 40 newspapers, and all of them are not published regularly. We decided to include all the local dailies and other papers that appear on a somewhat regular basis - weekly, bi-weekly, etc. As for radio and television stations in Monrovia, all commercial stations were assessed, as well as the only women's radio station, donor funded Star Radio and the Catholic Radio Veritas. Star was chosen because of its reach and the prominent role it has established for itself in post war Liberia. For two years running, Star has been voted by its peers as the best radio station (based on news and feature programming). The Catholic Radio Veritas was assessed because it is part of the niche radio news market.

For the community radio industry, a number of recent studies were available. We chose to target stations that were not included in those studies. Additionally, CSML partner the LMC currently has a European Union funded program that provides support for selected partner stations. Where possible, we targeted non LMC partners to get a sense of how these entities were surviving without international support. There were some instances where we could not avoid LMC partners. In Lofa for example, Radio Life in Zorzor and Radio Kintoma in Voinjama were assessed. They both have some form of partnership with the LMC. However, we chose to assess them due to recent ethnic violence (with a religious undertone) in the county. Both stations were off the air at the time due to technical reasons, and some have argued that their absence helped fuel the rumors that inflamed the situation and eventually led to the violence. In other words, there was an information vacuum. Credible information was not forthcoming, and people relied on false information spread mostly by text messaging. Because of the tenuous nature of peace in the county, we decided to visit these stations and assess their readiness or lack thereof to deliver on the huge expectations people have of them.

## **3. GENERAL OVERVIEW OF THE MEDIA SECTOR**

Monrovia, the capital city of Liberia, is saturated with media organizations. There are 40 newspapers (including dailies and weeklies) and at least 20 radio and 7 television stations. Niche newspapers are emerging, but their financial sustainability

is uncertain. In the past, broadcast and print outlets have received training from the LMC, Press Union of Liberia (PUL), National Democratic Institute (NDI), International Alert, Mercy Corps and UNMIL. Currently, IREX is leading the field among international organizations with funding for media development.

#### **4. ASSESSMENT OF PRINT OUTLETS IN MONROVIA**

The Team visited 17 newspapers in Monrovia and one was assessed by telephone. The print outlets are located in downtown Monrovia and Congo Town. Newsrooms range in size from small staffs (under 20) to over 40 fulltime employees. Newsrooms reflect a top-down culture where editors assign stories to reporters. Editors and managers are senior journalists who have many years of experience in Liberia and in some cases abroad (US, Netherlands).

One of the consequences of the civil war was the brain drain Liberia suffered. The media was no exception, losing a large percentage of its trained or more experienced manpower to the Diaspora. In its report, Liberia's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) listed the lack of trained manpower as one of the cardinal problems facing today's media. The TRC notes, "Many of those with any formal education in Journalism and other veterans of the craft are either practicing out of the country or have taken up employment with NGOs or government agencies."<sup>1</sup> Consequently, the standard of journalism is considerably low. Staff reporters are usually young and in some cases inexperienced. Some are currently working on their degrees in Journalism and Mass Communication at the state-run University of Liberia and other institutions of higher learning. But that may make very little difference for their professional development as most of the curricula at these schools "are outdated and instructors are in dire need of professionalization opportunities."<sup>2</sup>

Newspapers have high turnovers due to low pay. The TRC notes in its report that Liberian journalists are some of the lowest paid in West Africa. Many newspapers pay their reporters about \$US 30-50 monthly, and managers acknowledged that they sometimes pay their employees late. Many newspapers rely on unpaid university interns.

##### **4.1. Gender Balance**

This remains an obstacle to diversity in reporting due in part to the low pay. Newspapers say they have a difficult time recruiting and retaining female reporters. The male to female ratio is about 75% male and 25% female with some outlets reporting no female members in the newsroom. Females tend to work on the business side of the newspaper industry in areas such as accounting. The *Daily Observer*, one of the largest newspapers, has recently appointed a woman as Associate Editor.

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<sup>1</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Final Report published in 2009

<sup>2</sup> Summary Report: Media Reach and Penetration Study, published by the Liberia Media Center in 2008

## **4.2. Business Development and Sustainability**

Sustainability is a significant challenge for the sector. Printing costs are expensive and many newspapers hope to solve this problem through buying their own printing press. This capital cost (roughly USD 25,000) may not be economically feasible due to the high costs associated with staffing and maintaining the presses.

Liberian newspapers have a fairly consistent general format in their content. The actual percentage of news and commentary content (news whole) generated by the staff of the newspapers appears to be about 30%. A review of five different newspapers (*Daily Observer*, *Front Page*, *The Analyst*, *Public Agenda*, and *The Independent*) showed that paid content that generates revenue includes letters, commentaries, and personal/family announcements. This material can account for up to 50% of the newspaper content. The remaining content comes from wire services about world events or sports. Politics, scandal and crime often appear as lead stories.

Editors and publishers interviewed claimed to be “on their way to sustainability” but acknowledged that they are not making profits. Advertisements bring in most of the income with 80% of ads coming from the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) and other UN agencies and international organizations. Another 20% of the revenue comes from government institutions, corporations and the business community. Interviewees complained of difficulty in collecting payments, especially from government agencies and businesses, which are often late in settling their debts, at times up to 90 days. The newspapers are concerned that there will be a gap in the advertising market as NGOs and UNMIL prepare to scale back their activities in Liberia. The advertising market will shrink because there is no equivalent industry such as banking or telecommunications that can take the place of these advertisers. The country’s economy, though growing at a rate of 5% annually, is still relatively weak to sustain a vibrant advertising culture driven by the business community. Additionally, newspapers experience difficulties in understanding and creating markets, and many lack the skill and knowledge to effectively develop business plans and strategies to improve income generation.

Circulation numbers range from a few hundred copies per day to several thousand copies. In Liberia, sales of newspapers and subscriptions are insufficient to allow the papers to be sustainable. There are few existing distribution routes for newspapers to be circulated beyond Monrovia. Many papers have tried to send copies to the counties (Nimba, Margibi, Firestone) for increased sales, but most have had difficult times getting their papers out there or recovering any revenue from the sale of the newspapers in these outlying areas. There are few stories from the counties in the newspapers, thus diminishing the relevance of the newspapers to rural audiences.

There is general acknowledgement among the interviewees that their organizations would benefit from basic and advanced IREX trainings. All interviewees indicated a desire for basic journalism skills, English grammar, investigative journalism, and technical training to help service computers. The newsrooms appear to have too few operating computers and few people capable of operating/fixing the existing (and somewhat older) computers. Newspapers with an online presence reported problems with hackers and technical difficulties.

## 5. MONROVIA-BASED RADIO AND TELEVISION STATIONS

The team visited 15 radio and television stations in the capital. Most of the radio stations are stand-alone like VERITAS and Star. But, there are also other outlets that run radio and television stations (Kings or Royal). Staff sizes range from very small (fewer than 10 people) to over 60 fulltime staff members, mostly very young between 20 to 30 years of age. There are approximately four managers per station.

The stations generally lease their space. Space is an issue since most radio and television stations appeared to have too little space for journalists to work, collaborate, and produce news stories. The technical equipment is old and some stations reported problems with their transmitters or antenna.

The content of the radio stations is roughly 60% entertainment programming. News content includes talk shows that discuss political and social issues as well as news bulletins. The news bulletins are created for the morning broadcast and then replayed during the day (between 3 and 6 times). Breaking news and updated information can be added to the bulletins when needed. Reporters do not have readily available transportation and most hire commercial bikes (pen pens) to travel to news locations. Many stations claim to produce 60-75% of their news and feature programs – news bulletins and analysis, talk shows, call in shows, theme shows, sports, etc. Other programs are paid for – programs produced by other groups and broadcast for a fee – guest programs, and relays from the BBC or VOA.

The reach of the stations is generally limited to Monrovia and surrounding areas, though Star Radio, VERITAS and UNMIL Radio (not assessed) have a wider reach, targeting rural counties.

Television stations rely heavily on relays from CNN, BBC, VOA, etc. Except for intermittent shows and sports, there are news bulletins that are usually aired during the early evening hours. Many of the stations go out, record programs (community events) and rebroadcast them for a fee. There is very little internally produced content due to the lack of capacity and financial and other resources.

Like radio, many of the TV stations serve only Monrovia and surrounding areas, though Real T.V. claims they will be able to reach Bong County by the end of the year.

Broadcast newsrooms have both informal and formal policies on source attribution, fact checking, and sexual harassment. While several of the stations had their policies posted in the newsroom, others noted that they would like to systematize their newsroom policies. Few stations complained of overt external pressure from the political or business community.

The stations have no formal method for evaluating their ability to meet audience needs, but most of them count the number and tone of telephone calls, emails, and letters to gauge audience interest. There is no reliable audience data in Liberia but Renaissance TV claims to have the largest and widest audience.

### **5.1. *Business Development and Sustainability***

Revenue sources include documentaries, advertisements, special features/events, talk shows, religious programming and third party/barter. Most stations have a



budget and a board of directors. Like their newspaper counterparts, radio and TV stations experience difficulties in understanding and creating markets, and in some cases those who run the sales and business departments lack the skill and knowledge to effectively develop business plans and strategies to improve income generation. The stations would benefit from financial management training in preparing budgets, long-term capital planning, and sustainability counseling.

The management at the radio and television stations seek all types of training including technical training, basic digital training in broadcast-TV/ radio, grammar, basic writing, script and news writing, TV Production, digital editing, facilitating talk shows, sales and marketing. There seems to be a preference for in-house training that provides a holistic approach to developing the skills to all organizational members rather than daylong training sessions that only benefit a few people.

## **6. WOMEN'S MEDIA AND SUPPORT ASSOCIATIONS**

The Team also met with two groups that advocate on behalf of women's issues - Female Journalists Association of Liberia (FEJAL) and the Liberia Women Media Action Committee (LIWOMAC). The status of women in the Liberian media is tenuous. Sexual harassment is a common practice, and many of the radio stations acknowledged that they have enacted organizational policies to stop sexual harassment. Across all media, women leave the business for higher paying, or more socially acceptable positions.

According to the Press Union of Liberia, a mere 13% of journalists in Liberia are women, and there are only five to six women in senior editorial or managerial positions. Female advocates contend that this creates a situation where women's issues are under covered, and even when they are featured they often lack depth, showcasing the lack of understanding of the complexities of some of these issues. To prove this point, a women's rights activist recently recounted a workshop exercise in which participants did a random sampling of 30 newspapers. The result: 85% of the images and articles were about men.

### **6.1. *Female Journalists Association of Liberia***

FEJAL is an advocacy organization whose goal is to help women in the Liberian media. It has experienced leadership problems over the years, and for the most part has been dysfunctional. It is attempting to reorganize, but is having difficulties getting the process started and would therefore benefit from capacity building and leadership training so that it might become an effective advocate of women in the media. FEJAL needs mentoring on delivering high quality services to members that empower female journalists.

### **6.2. *Liberia Women Media Action Committee***

LIWOMAC, an implementing partner of the CSML's Women's Media Initiative, is an organization that seeks to promote the rights of women through the media. It aims to serve as a bridge between the Liberian media and women in various communities. IREX will work with the organization to design a "comprehensive strategy" on advancing women in the media.

While stronger than FEJAL, LIWOMAC's capacity is relatively weak and needs institutional strengthening, program and management training. But from all indications, it appears to be the strongest and most active women's media group in the country.

LIWOMAC runs the Liberia Women Democracy Radio (LWDR), the first and only female radio station in the country. It is located in Congo Town where they lease the space. The organization has newer equipment from UNIFEM, and its editorial staff has received some donor funded training. It has 23 employees including three managers, and all but seven of its staff is female. At the time of our visit, the station had been off the air for more than two months due to a lightning strike, but has since resumed transmission. It broadcasts a mix of donated programming and original content for 10 hours a day.

Like many other donor funded stations in Liberia, LWDR is at a crucial stage. It is fully dependent on donors and has no concrete business plans for financial sustainability. It would also benefit from capacity building, leadership and business development training.

## **7. COMMUNITY RADIO ASSESSMENT**

The Team visited five counties during the assessment. Due to travel and time constraints, some stations were interviewed by phone. Community radio has the potential to deliver relevant local news to rural populations and provide a community forum for the discussion of key topics. But, these organizations face enormous challenges due to their geographic isolation, lack of trained journalists and technical staff, low levels of economic development in the counties, and varying levels of community support for the radio stations.

Mercy Corps set up most of the community radio stations – close to 40. They donated start-up equipment including transmitters and antennas (2003 – 2005). It is not clear what criteria were used to decide on location, but some of the stations seemed to have been placed in communities with no or low economic capacity for community support. Commercial activities in some of these areas are almost non-existent, and communities of mostly subsistence farmers seemingly do not have the capacity to sustain these stations. They survive on handouts from donors – the LMC, Talking Drum, etc. These organizations usually provide needed equipment and training.

International Alert also helped start a number of community stations. Today, many of the transmitters provided by these donors are not working on full rated power. This diminishes the reach of the stations. See Table 1 for a summary of the reach of the community radio stations.

The basic equipment needs of a community radio station include grounding for the equipment and studio, one or two computers, CD player/tape deck, microphones, transmitter, antennas, headphones, voltage regulator, and tuner. Mixers, stabilizers, digital recorders, air conditioners/fans, and insulation for soundproofing are also important.

The fact that a radio station has been given or has purchased this equipment does not mean that the equipment is working. The Team found that many stations had broken equipment and could not find anyone on staff or locally to fix malfunctioning components. International Alert and Mercy Corps no longer provide any assistance or training. The LMC has provided some newer equipment and has hosted training sessions for its partners. However, not all community stations are LMC partners.

Local boards direct the community radio stations. Board members (between 9 and 13 people) are elected by the community and represent different sectors. There are a number of stations with very active boards. In River Gee, Radio Gee was conducting test broadcasts during our visit after being off the air for about six months due to technical problems. Some members of the board were present during our assessment, expressing their enthusiasm for the station and their concern for the lack of resources and how that could impact the station's survival. Peace Radio in Toe's Town, Grand Gedeh County is another station with a very active board. These are just two examples of very strong boards from the eight stations we visited. The others have varying levels of board support. In a few cases, the board exist only name. Where the board is active members usually meet each quarter or every six months. They approve budgets and have firing and hiring power.

### **7.1.      *Programming***

The stations are broadcasting between 3 hours and 20 hours per day. Most of the airtime is dedicated to music, but the stations also carry a variety of programs. Our interviews suggest that the structure is similar for most community radio stations. The programs can be put in three categories: self produced, borrowed programs (programs produced by others – NGOs, etc. and broadcast, usually for a fee), and relays. Many of the stations claim to produce 60% of their programs, which usually include themes on health, agriculture, politics, etc. Some have diversity programming such as gender issues, youth programs, and many of them broadcast in at least one other local language. Others have programming in six different languages including Mandingo, Kpelle, Lorma, and Belle. Nearly all stations have news programs consisting of short, live news bulletins, which are repeated at regularly scheduled times during the day. Updates and breaking news are added to the scripts of the news bulletins. There are also live call-in shows, a popular format all across Liberia even with the Monrovia stations. (See Table 2 for a sample program line up from one of the stations).

News and feature productions are limited, because of the inability of staff to travel around the areas within the station's reach to gather material. Many do not have the resources to provide transportation for the staff. A few stations have at least one motor bike, which is often used by the management. Because of the lack of transportation, the news team, usually three to five persons, limit themselves to areas near the city or town where the station is located, leaving out other communities within the coverage area.

Stations claim to consider the needs and concerns of the community in designing programs. How this is done is not clear, but each answered yes to the question of

whether the views of the community are considered in program formulation.



*(A young announcer on the air at Y-Echo during the Team's visit)*

## **7.2. Space and other Concerns**

Space is another issue for these community outlets. Many have only one room dedicated to live production. There is no production studio, no newsroom or additional rooms for journalists to develop/produce shows. There are a few stations with guest studios (room with a table and microphones) and a control room – where the announcer would usually sit. But with community support (some stations report excellent relationships with the community) some of the stations now have their own space, or are constructing a dedicated building. Radio Life in Zorzor was the most spacious, yet they had one live studio and a guest studio. At most stations, noise is an issue due to the cramped space.



*(At Radio Saclepea in Nimba County, the Team met the staff in a tiny cramped room, which was the only other space apart from the studio)*

Some stations have free electricity provided by GSM companies, CellCom and Lone Star. They strike a deal with either one of these companies to promote their products. In return they get free electricity from the company's transmitter facilities, which are usually located next to the station. Many that are powered by CellCom complain of frequent fluctuations, which may be putting their equipment at risk. Some have decided to explore switching to Lone Star, which seems to have a more stable power supply. Other stations rely on solar panels or generators for power. The ones that rely on generators must constantly find ways to raise money from the community for fuel.

The community radio stations lack the basic tools required in journalism (digital recorders and transportation for reporters to cover local stories). Most stations have no method for archiving stories. The news must be read aloud each time and the stations lack the capacity to record and replay news. At one station, a volunteer records the BBC news on his cell phone and then he places the cell phone in front of the microphone to replay the program for the community.

All stations are staffed solely by volunteers who are paid stipends on a somewhat irregular basis. The payment depends on the station's income for the month. If they fail to raise enough, volunteers may receive no stipend for that month. Volunteers come from all sectors of the community, but many are unemployed and spend their extra time at the station. There is a gender imbalance similar to the situation in Monrovia. The stations note that it is difficult to retain female members because of the lack of salary. (See Table 1 for a breakdown of the gender and staff composition of the stations.)



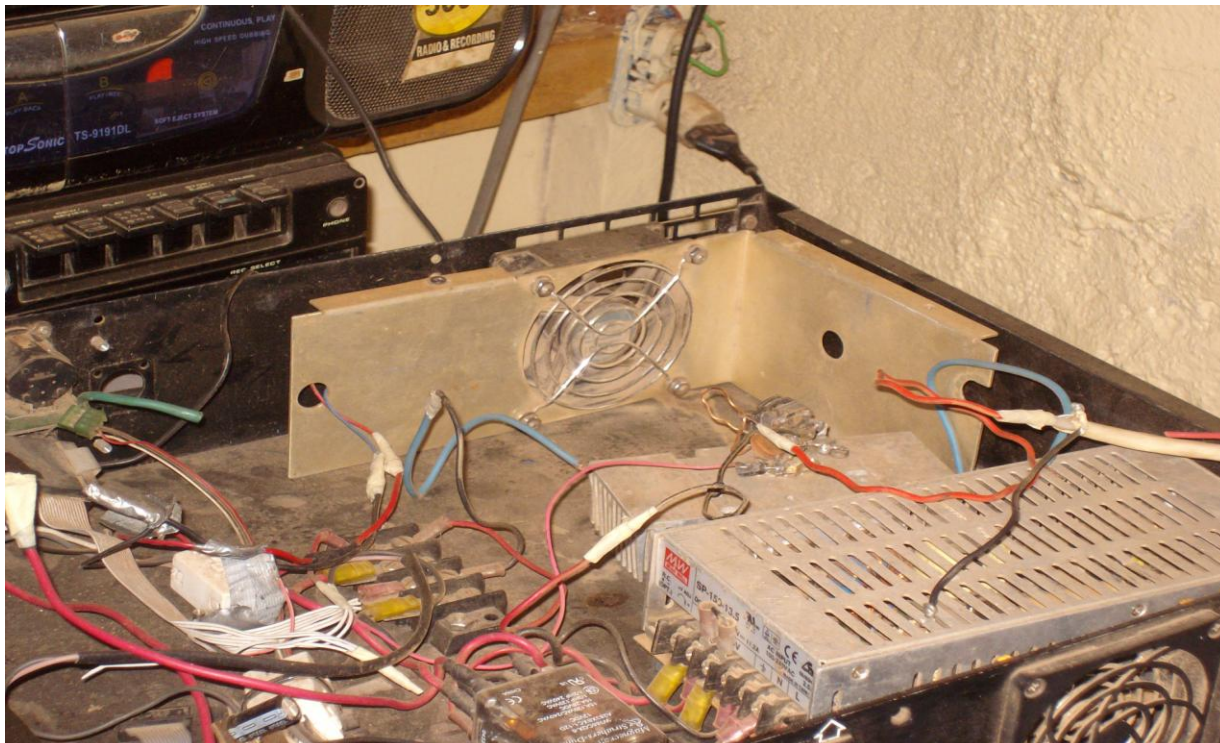
### **7.3.      *Technical Difficulties***

Not one station visited had a trained radio technician. There is usually someone on staff who is referred to as a technician, but most often he lacks the education or practical experience to effectively work as a radio technician. This is perhaps one of the most urgent problems. Because of the lack of knowledge, equipment is not properly cared for. Preventive maintenance is not a part of the regular routine. For example, at several of the outlets, including Jorwah Radio and Radio Kintoma, the transmitters and other equipment are exposed to dust, and the simplest preventive measure – covering the equipment at the end of each day – is not applied. Additionally, at many of the stations transmitters and other equipment are not checked for problems. This results in frequent equipment malfunction, and most often the equipment has to be sent to Monrovia for repair.

Technical problems often leave stations off the air for long periods. When the Team visited Radio Gee in Fishtown, it was just resuming broadcast, having been off the air for about seven months. Radio Kintoma in Lofa was off the air for nearly two years and just restarted broadcast with the help of Talking Drum Studio. Many of the problems are the same regardless of station or county. The most frequent – transmitter damage due to lightning. In fact, during our drive to Ganta, Nimba County, we were listening to a World Cup game being relayed by one of the Ganta stations when it suddenly went off the air. Minutes later, the LMC's technician traveling with the team, Marcus Shamu got a call from the station asking for help. They had just been struck by lightning. We visited that station later and found that the lightning strike badly damaged the transmitter and studio equipment. Marcus Shamu's assessment showed that facilities at many stations are not properly grounded, which increases the lightning threat.

There are less serious problems at times, which could be fixed with a trained technician on staff. For example, a brand new Adobe Audition editing set at one of the stations was down upon our arrival. It took Marcus (LMC technician) 20 minutes to get the set working. The problem: it had not been properly installed, but the staff technician concluded that it was broken.

There were at least two stations that had their transmitters in the control room (studio) or in areas frequented by staff. The technician (Marcus Shamu) advised that this could be dangerous to the health of the staff.



*(Y-Echo in Ganta has a locally built transmitter that's located in studio. The station also has its antenna mounted on a pole made of reed. The rapid decay, especially during the Raining Season, forces the staff to change the pole every four months.)*

#### **7.4. Sustainability**

This is a major issue for all community radio stations. IREX cannot use the same standard of financial sustainability to evaluate these stations. The stations are aware that they need concrete business plans, and few of them have written financial plans, policies, or established record keeping systems. All the managers and board members interviewed agreed that there is a need for more training in business development, income generation, etc. At present, revenue is generated by carrying paid programming (UNMIL or religious shows) or by asking for payment for announcements, requests, and, in some cases, interviews.

In some communities, the survival of its only radio station is at stake. Community support is frail at best, and the stations are not making enough to sustain them. Some in the larger communities have sales associates who try to sell advertising to local business, but there is such a small market for generating advertising revenue. Other stations are taking an entrepreneurial approach by selling photocopies or by revenue sharing with GSM companies like CellCom. One Ganta station, Y-Echo, subscribes to cable television and charges residents a small fee to watch soccer and other sports.

There are varying levels of external pressures. Many stations reported cordial relationships with county officials, but there have been instances where a reporter was detained. This type of pressure appears to be rare.

The community radio stations in the counties need all types of training. They identified topics including Adobe, reporting, financial management, technical training, program production, fund raising, conflict sensitive reporting, elections reporting, and ways to involve the community in the station.

## 8. CONCLUSIONS

This is a crucial time for the Liberian media sector. In the capital of Monrovia, there are too many stations, too few professional journalists and editors, and too few sources of advertising. Just as quickly as the sector has grown, it may as quickly fade away as economic pressures force outlets to close. Attrition in the sector is expected because it is a normal part of transitional media. However, it is imperative that moderate, professional outlets be given the skills necessary to ensure that they are among those outlets that survive. The training needs across the Monrovia media sector are clear: business management, strategic planning, marketing, basic and advanced journalism, and technical development. These are topics that IREX specializes in. Throughout the next few weeks, IREX will begin to identify partners and targets in Monrovia to help strengthen the sector. Special attention will be given to ensuring that gender equality and equity is integrated throughout the IREX program. IREX will find willing partners across the capital. Every media organization interviewed is interested in becoming more professional and more sustainable. This seems to be an ideal time for the CSML start up.

Whereas the Monrovia media sector has a cadre of journalists and media organizations with fundamental capacities, the community radio scene is a bit different. The buildings exist but the foundational skills and technical competencies of radio journalism are missing. The community radio sector needs to evolve into potentially viable entities that can be sustained by their communities. While the isolation of the stations makes them difficult to reach, it is clear that they are the most important mechanism for developing peaceful communities. If it takes a village to raise a child, it will take a community to develop and sustain community radio. A holistic approach of cooperation between the two sides of CSML, civil society and media, is needed to develop community radio. The Liberian media sector has proven that it can bounce back from tragedy and conflict. There are committed people in both the capital and the counties who recognize the role of media in the future of the country. A foundation exists and now it is up to CSML to empower the existing media organizations to serve their function in a democratic Liberia.



## 9. ATTACHMENTS AND APENDICES

Table 1 (Reach, Staff and Broadcast Languages)

Name	Estimated Reach	# Staff/Volunteers	Languages	
Radio Jorwah	10,000	12 staff (no women at present) 5 managers	Kpelle, Mandingo, French, English	
Peace Radio	50,000	16 volunteers (2 women)		
Radio Kintoma	60% of county (parts of Guinea, Sierra Leone)	20 volunteers (3 female language announcers)	6 Local, French, English	
Radio Life	100,000	18 volunteers (5 managers – 1 female) (3 female on staff)	Kpelle, Mandingo, Belle, Lorma, English	
Radio Scalepea	10,000	35 (25 stipend) 3 females were previously on staff	6 Local, French, English	
Radio River Gee	8,000-9,000	10 staff (3 women on staff)	English, Grebo	
Radio Tappitta	20,000	14 staff (5 management), (2 women) + (5 volunteers)	6 Local, English	
Y-FM	Ganta (need numbers)	15 volunteers (3 females) (4 managers) (3 reporters)	<u>English, check if any other?</u>	
Magic FM (phone)	Grand Bassa County	Staff: 15, females 3, 1 gender coordinator,	2 Language programs	

Radio Sahnwen (phone)	Nimba	Staff- 20, 4-women, Managers-6(station, business, programs, treasurer, news, Assist. news)	Mano, Mandingo, Gio, and Khran	
Radio Helingee (phone)	Foya, border towns in Sierra Leone, Guinea and Voinjama	Staff-10, 1 female, managers-programs, production, sales, administrator, 9 volunteers	4 language programs,	

Table 2 (Sample Program Line Up)

Program	Origin
Community and You	Locally Produced
You and Your Health	Locally Produced
Community Profile	Locally Produced
Development and You	Locally Produced
Farmers' Forum	Locally Produced
News	Locally Produced
Justice and Peace Commission Broadcast	Produced by Catholic Rights group and broadcast for a fee
The Carter Center Programs	Produced by Carter Center and broadcast for a fee
Youth for Development	Locally Produced
HIV/ AIDS (Face the Fact)	Produced by NGO

# Appendix A



*CSML Civil Society and Media Leadership  
Program*



## ***MEDIA COMPONENT START UP ASSESSMENT PLAN***

## ASSESSMENT

### 1. Introduction

The technical proposal presented to USAID calls for a start-up assessment to inform the work of the CSML team as it begins the implementation of the program. At our workplan meeting held in April 2010, it was agreed that the media component would undertake the assessment beginning in May with a Consultative Meeting involving our partners, the Carter Center and Social Impact, as well as our local implementing partners, the Liberia Media Center and the Liberia Women Media Action Committee.

We convened the Consultative Meeting on Monday, May 31. In addition to our partners, we invited the Association of Liberian Community Radios (ALICOR). Their participation was crucial in helping us understand current conditions at stations in our seven target counties.

This document, which outlines plans for the start-up assessment, is a result of the day long Consultative Meeting and a subsequent planning meeting with the Liberia Media Center. It outlines the methodologies, various focus areas of the planned assessment, the media outlets in the seven counties to be assessed, and questions to be asked during the assessment.

Under each focus area, you will find results of the Consultative Meeting and recommendations and decisions on how to move forward with the assessment. This will be followed by the target outlets of the assessment and the proposed questionnaires.

### 2. Methodology

On site interviews using prepared questions; review of existing research documents from the LMC and International Alert; listening to stations during assessment visits; site inspection of equipment; and telephone interviews. The assessment team is unable to visit every station in the seven counties, thus the need for telephone interviews.

### 3. Assessment Focus Areas

#### *3.1. Specialized Consulting for Targeted Media Outlets*

#### **Findings of the Consultative Meeting**

##### **Monrovia Media Outlets**

- Available data on ranking of commercial and semi-commercial radio stations based on audience survey (World Bank 2009/2010)
- Content of commercial radio saturated with music, relay programs and advertisement
- UNMIL Radio still remains the farthest reaching network and currently dominates

#### **Limitations**

- Very limited data on Monrovia radio outlets to include news room culture, radio programs, news sources and skill levels of staff;
- Need for comprehensive review and research
- The absence of data on newspapers – newsroom culture, business model, news sources, skill levels, etc.

## **Conclusion**

The participants of the Consultative Meeting agreed to do a full assessment on the Monrovia Media. LMC and IREX are reaching out to outlets. Assessment will determine existing conditions at various outlets: newsroom culture, radio programs, news, news sources, skill levels of staff, etc.

### ***3.2. Business Development and Sustainability Training***

*The outlets above and community radio stations in the seven target counties will be the focus of this portion of the assessment.*

#### **To be assessed:**

Business models/plans, management structure, pay scale (average salary of a reporter), accounting and budgeting policies (practices), advertising and promotion strategy, etc. For non commercial outlets, we will review income generating activities and how effective they are.

#### **3.2.1. Community Radio Stations in Seven Target Counties Engage with the Community and Work to Include Diverse Audiences and Improve Reach**

### **Findings of the Consultative Meeting**

- The community radio industry grew at an alarming rate in the years following the war in Liberia. Today, there are about 50 plus community stations around the country. Lately, there's been a slight decline in the explosive growth.
- Sustainability modules not working very well, as stations depend heavily on individual managers and out-sourced power from GSM companies;
- Attrition of Staff has made training and re-training a recurring problem;
- LMC has conducted two major studies of community radio stations – 2007 and 2010. As a result, it has a comprehensive listing and ratings of close to 35 community radio stations in fourteen of Liberia's fifteen counties to include all but one of the CSML's seven target counties.
- The findings from those studies could help inform IREX's own assessment.

## **Limitations**

- The most current research was conducted in 2010 but covered only nine stations, making the need for current review. 2007 study was more extensive, but a lot has changed since then.
- Research focused largely on assessing the state of the stations than other external conditions, including the participation of citizens in its operation, ownership issues and local commitment to sustainability
- Research did not account for risk factors, including the impact of attrition, political interference and the passive involvement of residents in the running of the station
- Research criteria focused mainly on stations with capacity, than those serving marginalized communities. As a result smaller stations in smaller communities with limited sustainability prospects were easily disregarded as opposed to stations serving larger communities and having better sustainability outlook

## **Comments/Suggestions/Inputs/recommendations**

- In dealing with attrition, community dwellers must be trained to produce programs by the CR
- Management must be trained to take a leading motivational approach and decentralize decision-making structures
- Community radio must established a feudal news to widen content generation and development
- Community management teams must be established with the involvement with CSO to ensure independence , freedom of expression

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion there is a need to ensure that the following are done with respect to the assessment:

- The structure of IREX's assessment should take into consideration the relevant works done in the 2 previous LMC assessments – 2007 & 2010. In other words, stations that were assessed, especially those that formed part of the 2010 assessment, should not necessarily form part of the upcoming assessment. IREX must make an effort to reach out to those stations and areas not previously visited or studied.
- The upcoming assessment should basically be concentrated on areas and stations in the seven target counties that were not adequately covered in LMC's two previous assessments.

The assessment will determine conditions at community radio stations in the seven target counties. Focus will be on newsroom culture, news and program contents, skill levels, conditions of equipment (studio, field and transmitters), access to technical and editorial training, impact of training, reach of the stations, business models/plans, management structure, community involvement with station, audience awareness and responsiveness to programs on stations, sources of news, etc.

### **3.2.2. Women's Media Initiative**

#### **Findings of Consultative Meeting**

- Current data on women media situations comes from the study, Mapping The Absent Voices- 2010
- Data on Skill level, experience, education, working environment etc
- Women account for less than 5% of what we term clout positions in the media sector
- Far lower experience and skill levels compared to male counterparts
- Most women in the media work in non-editorial positions (close to 60%)

#### **Limitations**

- Person to person interviews were only conducted in Monrovia, while mobile interviews were conducted in the rural areas
- Full report still in progress

#### **Conclusion**

Each focus area of the assessment should include questions on women in the media – male – female ratio in each entity, skill level of female journalists, number of women in managerial positions, etc.

The assessment should also get the perspective of women's advocacy and media groups on how women are portrayed in the media, what is needed in a comprehensive strategy on advancing women in the media, etc.

#### **4. Groups to Outreach**

- FEJAL – Female Journalists Association of Liberia
- MEWOCED
- LWDR- Liberia Women Democracy Radio
- ABI – Angie Brooks International Center for Women
- WONGOSOL – Women's NGO Secretariat of Liberia



## 5. Monrovia Outlets to be Assessed



### 5.1. Newspapers

#### 5.1.1. Leading Dailies

1. New Democrat
2. Daily Observer
3. Inquirer
4. News
5. Frontpage Africa
6. Heritage
7. Analyst
8. The Informer

#### 5.1.2. Irregulars

1. Public Agenda
2. Plain Truth
3. The Renaissance
4. National Chronicle
5. New Dawn
6. The Monitor

#### 5.1.3. Occasional Papers

1. New Vision
2. Liberia Journal
3. Telegraph
4. The Independent
5. The Informer



### 5.2. Radios (Monrovia)

1. Crystal FM 95.5 (Commercial)
2. Truth FM 96.1 (Commercial)
3. Power FM 93.3
4. SKY FM 107.0
5. Radio Veritas 97.6 (Non Profit)
6. Star Radio 104.0(Non profit)
7. LOVE FM 105 (Commercial)
- LWDR (Non profit)



### **5.3. Television Stations**

#### *Commercial TV*

1. Power TV
2. Real TV
3. Love 105
4. Royal TV
5. SKY

#### *Non Commercial TV*

1. Cuttington TV

### **5.4. Community Radio Stations**

1. Radio Gee – River Gee County - visit
2. Peace Radio – Toe Town, Grand Gedeh County – visit
3. Voice of Tappita – Tappita, Nimba County - visit
4. Radio Saclapea – Saclapea, Nimba County - visit
5. Radio Jorwah – Jorwah, Bong County - visit
6. Radio Life – Zorzor, Lofa County - visit
7. Radio Kintoma – Voinjama, Lofa County - visit
8. Radio Totota – Totota, Bong County – visit
9. Radio Dugba – Buchanan, Grand Bassa County - telephone
10. Y-Echo - visit
11. Cuttington Radio- visit
12. Radio Khegheamah – Nimba County - telephone
13. Radio Helingee – Lofa County - telephone
14. Radio Sahnwen – Nimba County - telephone
15. Magic FM – Grand Bassa County - telephone
16. Radio Bensonville – Montserrado County - telephone
17. Radio Salala – Bong County - telephone
18. Radio Gbarnga – Stop Over

## START-UP ASSESMENT RADIO/NEWSPAPERS

June 2009

<b>1. General information</b>		
Date of Visit:	Name consultant(s) :	
Country : Liberia	Name of Radio/Newspaper:	
Place of establishment:	Language of broadcasting : English and local vernaculars	
Year of foundation:	No. of listeners (estimation) :	
Name Managing Editor/Station Manager :		
Composition of management :		
Frequency/Publication's Name:		
E-mail/website :	Telephone :	

### *A. Specialized Consulting for Targeted Media Outlets*

#### **Questionnaire for Newspapers:**

1. What are your usual sources of news for the paper?
2. Is there a policy in place that establishes number of sources for a particular or developing story before it is published?
3. How critically do you analyze government's press releases and other speeches before printing?
4. What % of the population do you reach by way of this outlet?
5. If chosen as one of the outlets for our specialized consultancy, what would you recommend that we focus on for your outlet?

#### **Staff:**

1. How many staff work for the institution?
2. How many full time employees?
3. How many part time staff?
4. How many freelancers?
5. What are the skill/education levels of the staff?

Secondary School	University Degree	Graduate Degree
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6. Is there a staff manual/employment policy?
7. If yes, are there gender sensitive provisions?
8. How many people comprise top management?

### *B. Business Development and Sustainability*

1. How would you describe the consumer market for articles or stories you carry?
2. What is the management or organizational structure of your media outlet?
3. How is the organization financed?
4. Do you have external sources of funding?

5. What is your key income generating activity?
6. Is there a written financial policy?
7. Is there a separate department that deals with finance/business?
8. Do you have financial reports? Monthly, bi-monthly or quarterly/annually?
9. What is the fiscal year of the institution?
10. Do you have budgets/ how is it planned and generated?
11. Are there other means through which the entity is sustained?
12. Do you have a bank account?
13. Has there been an audit of the institution's finances over the past 3 years? Or when was the last audit?
14. Amount of advertising and additional fee revenue generated by outlet (if applicable)
15. Do you (media outlet) have a 3-5 year financial plan in place?
16. From your perspective, what is needed to help outlets like you and others develop sustainable business plan? (Ask if necessary).

#### **Questionnaire for Radio (Community & Monrovia)**

1. Is the current infrastructure owned by the CR/rented /leased?
2. If rented and leased, Have you been able to adequately pay its cost?
3. How long has the station been operating?
4. What is the current height of tower/antenna?
5. What is the current transmission coverage? Are there any technical problems in reception of the programs broadcast?
6. Are there any risks - climate/poor infrastructure?
7. Is the studio fully equipped? List of equipment?
8. Is there adequate space?

#### **Staff**

1. What is the leadership structure of your station?
2. What is the total number of staff?
3. What is the ratio of males to females?
4. What professional development trainings, workshops or seminars have the staff benefitted from? If any training was attended, what was the main topic/focus of some of the trainings?
5. What impact have these trainings had on your staff performance? Why do you think this is?
6. Were job descriptions provided for staff positions?
7. How many permanent staff do you have?
8. How many volunteers and temporary staff do you have?
9. Can you list the tools and equipment that the station has?

#### **Service of third parties**

1. Are there any services of third parties such as electricity, insurance, accountancy?

2. If none exists, would you like to have a third party to provide service? How do you think it would work?
3. If it already exists, what has been the impact of such co-existence? Do you need additional help, and in what area(s)?

### **Programming**

1. What is the total number of programs being produced?
2. What % of airtime is devoted to community information, dialogues, or engagement?
3. How do you measure programming quality
4. How many public affairs-call-in, live talk shows or roundtables?
5. Does your audience participate in any programs? How?
6. What issues are talked about in these programs and how are they different from those in mainstream media? Are there avenues to give feedback?
7. What do they find are the uses of such a project (the station) and its program-information, education, entertainment, etc?
8. How many programs do you have that focus on entertainment and sports?
9. How many of your programs are targeted to youths?
10. How many for women advocacy and development?
11. How many religious?
12. How much time is devoted to news and information?
13. Are programs in local languages?
14. How is the content for programs developed and generated/
15. What are the sources of information?
16. Are the audiences pleased with the programming content, quality and schedule?
17. Do you research with your audience before program ideas are developed?
18. Is your programming based on the choice of your audience?
19. Is there any external control (political or otherwise) on what goes on the air?
20. Do you conduct live broadcasts?

21. Is the station accessible to all regardless of sex, creed, religion or sect? Do you think the station is well located?
22. Does the community have a sense of ownership to the entity?
23. Do they visit the facility? Would they like to be on the programs?

### **Questionnaire for Television Stations**

1. What is the television coverage? What % of the population do you reach by way of television?
2. What is the total number of programs being produced?
3. What is the quality of the broadcast? How do you currently measure the quality of broadcasts?
4. How often are new programs, shows developed?

### **Miscellaneous**

1. Do you have access to readily available information necessary for performance such as statistics, access to internet and other resources?
2. To what degree/extent are the people (audience) exposed to this media outlet?
3. How did they come to know of it?
4. How reliable is your power supply?
5. How are newspapers distributed in and outside of the city?
6. How are reports or stories filed in by correspondents from the field?
7. Can the correspondent hear the radio broadcast from where he reports? Is he able to receive quick feedback?

### ***C. Questionnaire for Women's Media Initiative***

1. How many female staff are there?
2. How many women are in senior editorial or management position here?
3. What role do other women play at this station?
4. What are the skill/education levels of the female staff?

Secondary School	University Degree	Graduate Degree
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### ***D. Questionnaire for Outreached Groups (FEJAL, etc.)***

1. What's responsible for the low number of women in newsrooms across the country?
2. How can this be addressed?
3. What are some of the issues facing female journalists in the country today?
4. How would you describe the way you are treated in newsrooms and while on assignments? Is the treatment different from that of your male colleagues'?
5. If there is gender imbalance in the media, how can we address that?

6. We are supposed to be developing a comprehensive strategy on advancing women in the media. From your perspective, what should that strategy entail?
7. How would you describe the coverage of women's issues by media organizations?
8. If women's issues are under-covered or poorly covered, how do we address that?